

The Soap Box Orator and Education in Alaska

By THOMAS B. DRAYTON



LESTER D. HENDERSON
Commissioner of Education,
Juneau, Alaska

Seward, Alaska, Nov.—
(By Mail).

A SOAP BOX orator made the statement in an Alaskan coast town last week that the universal dissemination of elementary education, chiefly through the public school, had broken the shackles binding former generations, dissipated superstitions, rendered this present life alone of importance to living men, and turned loose aspirations and purposes which would eventually make all men equal economically, or wreck the world irreparably.

The soap box orator is a new institution in Alaska, and, frankly, one not held in high esteem; but if the preachments

with which this type of gentry has been flooding Alaska during these last few months contain the germs of truth it is worse than idle to ignore them; if they be inherently unsound, then seemingly there is nothing in them to mortally offend, and certainly nothing to seriously alarm, the unemotional or normal citizen.

If there be, or if there be not, a considerable percentage of truth in the words of our soap box orator, or in their logical implication, the fact that this type of propagandist credits our system of universal education with giving birth to doctrines that most Alaskans look upon as inimical to their material interests, religious faith, and social well-being, would seem to invite, or at least excuse, a brief examination of the Alaskan public schools through which that universal elementary education is disseminated in this Territory. And, incidentally, the consideration of the subject may serve to correct the erroneous but entirely natural opinion of many American citizens in the States that the Alaska public schools are of the primitive, pioneer class.

To avoid confusion or misapprehension it may be explained that the United States Bureau of Education maintains a large number of primary schools for the instruction of natives exclusively, to which both children and adults are admitted; and that in former years the Bureau also maintained a few schools for the benefit of white children, but these latter were discontinued upon the enactment of the Nelson School Law, drafted by Senator Nelson of Minnesota, since which time the Bureau has had no part in the education of white children. The present public school system had its inception in the Nelson law, which continued in force until the passage, in 1917, of the Alaska Uniform School Act, an enlargement, but in no sense an abrogation, of the former law. Under these respective enactments there have been created the seventy different schools comprising the Alaska public school system as it exists today. Of these schools eighteen are within incorporated towns or villages and fifty-two in unincorporated settlements; the latter type of territorial subdivision being lawfully entitled to a publicly supported school where a minimum of twenty children of school age can be shown to reside. These seventy separate schools employ an aggregate of one hundred and fifty teachers, who possess an average actual teaching experience of more than seven and one-half years, and of whom seventy per cent are graduates of colleges or normal schools. Of the teachers assigned eighth to twelfth grade work all are college or normal school graduates, and eighty per cent of these high school teachers have enjoyed the additional advantages of post-graduate work. A similar high standard of scholastic qualifications, united with so large a teaching experience, is not disclosed among any of a large number of printed reports, records and other data gathered from various leading educational centers of the United States.

At the head of this educational system from the day of its inception, shaping its policy, dominating it absolutely, infusing into it his individuality and ideals, is Lester D. Henderson, Territorial Commissioner of Education; a man unalterably convinced that the formation of sound personal character upon a profound respect for the moral system inculcated through the Christian religion, is of infinitely more importance than any other phase or feature of the education of youth. With these ideals and these conceptions of duty and moral responsibility drilled into the minds of Alaska's children almost from their infancy it may be presumed that Alaska will prove an inhospitable soil for the planting of doctrines abhorrent to those convictions, irrespective of the claims of what indiscriminate common school education may or may not have contributed in times past and in other latitudes toward the present economic restlessness of mankind.

The normal type of Alaskan child, the raw material with which our schools have to deal, has also a measure of significance. It is a fact easily susceptible of proof, even if less easily explained, that the average Alaska child who is transferred from an Alaska school to a public school in the United States almost invariably

takes rank at the head of his class. The circumstance that Alaskan children spring from a particularly strong and robust stock, and thus inherit superior physical strength, possibly explains to a considerable extent their capacity and inclination for greater mental effort. The peculiar environment of their lives in this far-northern land, where they learn to face without fear the elemental forces of nature at their worst, and, in outlying districts, constant menace from the prowling wild beasts that too often exact human life as their tribute, tends to develop a self-reliance in our children not to be expected under other conditions of life. Then, too, the fact that the 3,500 school children in the Alaskan public schools constitute undoubtedly the most cosmopolitan group of pupils to be found in any school system of the world would perhaps also have a contributing influence, at least in broadening them, with its resultant consequences. But 1,307 of our public school children are Alaskan-born, the others being recruited from the uttermost points of the earth.

That the association of unusually vigorous, cosmopolitan, self-reliant children under the teaching of highly-qualified instructors of long practical experience, who are in turn animated by the loftiest ideals, should produce unusual results would naturally be expected. Indeed, the Standard Intelligence tests used here and in all the foremost schools of the States, show uniformly, year after year, a higher rating among Alaska children than among those of any state in the Union. In the attainment of these flattering results nothing unusual has been introduced or attempted except possibly a greater attention to the fundamentals of personal character-training; although the Alaska teacher is by general consent accorded a larger disciplinary discretion than in some states where a more modern if less sensible conception of the relation of teacher and pupil has obtained a presumably temporary ascendancy. The same subjects, the same textbooks, and the same general course of study obtain as in the public schools generally of the United States proper. Alaska's one distinctive feature in education is the reflection of that character-building policy of Lester D. Henderson, against which it is thought the gathering storms of red revolution will beat in vain during the years to come.

The Paradise of Babies

By MRS. JIGORA HATOYAMA

AMERICAN ladies who come to our country and observe our babies frequently declare that "Japanese babies never cry." This is not exactly true, of course, for Japanese babies have their little aches and pains like many other babies, and cut their teeth and undergo other trials that occasionally cause them to cry. But in comparison with the average baby of the Occident, where I have lived many years, they might well be classed as non-crying babies.

Some have said that the Japanese love their babies more than all other peoples. This is absurd. It just happens that Japan is a paradise for babies. We do no more and no less for them than the people of other countries, but we do different things for them and especially is the Japanese baby fortunate because of the many things that we do not do for them.

The first thing that comes into play is our inherent worship for motherhood. In Japan womanhood is not a whit more sacred than manhood. But motherhood! Ah, that's different! Motherhood is woman's halo.

This a young woman missionary from America could not understand. "Poor thing!" said she to a Japanese friend of hers when they came upon a rather young mother with a child on a pleasant afternoon walk. "So young and already has a child!"

Her Japanese friend stared at the missionary in blank amazement. To pity a mother is beyond the wildest fancies of a Japanese woman. It is all that the Japanese feminine virtue can do to keep itself from getting madly jealous of a mother, no matter of what social position, and quite independent of cents and dollars. For this there are many reasons. Here is one:

In an ancient book called Onna Dai-gaku (a veritable Bible in the eyes of the Japanese woman) you can read of the seven valid grounds for divorce, of which, in the language of the sacred book itself, "the sages from ancient days have approved."

Childlessness stands second on the dreaded list!

Would you see the most pathetic of many social outcasts in Japan, not excepting the *hinin* (that is to say, no-humans) of the ancient order (children of Korean and Chinese captives originally)? There she is—a Japanese wife without a child! No one can call a woman worse names or say a more cutting, a more unkindly, thing than to call her a "stone woman." It is a fact that the old stork is a god with Japanese women. And the number of shrines dedicated to a certain God of Increase in Japan is scandalously many. And they prosper still more scandalously—from the grateful thanksgiving offerings of fulfilled prayers as well as from the votive offerings of petitioners for grace.

And, then, how the neighbors, especially women neighbors, conspire to smooth the way for the mother-to-be! Oh, yes, we have that charming and rare virtue of minding everybody's else business in Japan. Even such delicate matters as washing the clothes and dust-

ing the house don't escape the neighbors' solicitude. They help in everything. She has to yield. If she resists, the alternative is simply an insane asylum. The conspiracy does not stop with her neighbors. The Japanese mother did not have the advantage of a Biblical injunction, "be fruitful and multiply," till very recent years; but she has had something else. Babies have been made the text of imperial messages. They were not put in words merely. Both the Emperor and the Empress have a way of putting their messages into more concrete gifts often. Today the Japanese are increasing at the rate of half a million a year. They are not at the rate of putting up a bar against immigration; although heaven knows we are somewhat embarrassed about space even as it is!

But let us see what the grown-ups do when the baby steps into the green room of incarnation.

For one thing, the grown-ups in Japan don't show their admiration and friendliness by treating it as a pink basket-ball and tossing it from one pair of arms to another. They know by their own sad experiences that life will do that, when its flesh is no longer pink as it is then. Nor do they take it for granted in their mature knowledge that the baby is a constantly operating phonograph receiver for sentimental gush. Here in America some people seem to think that shaking and rocking and trotting and jolting and slamming down windows so that their next flat neighbor might not hear the music, are about the only panaceas for an attack of colic. The Japanese parents and nurses don't quite take that view. Even if the baby does cry, no one jumps to the conclusion that the world is coming to an end on the spot. It is allowed to cry if it wishes to, and cry in the atmosphere of philosophic quiet. Babies are not encouraged in their emotional exhibitions. The elders don't give them examples of hysterics and nervous fits very often.

And then the dress! In Japan, as in America, baby's dresses are made long so that they cover their bare feet. But that is about where the similarity stops. They are cut after the general pattern of the kimono for grown-ups, with wide sleeves and made to fold over in front. They have no buttons, and are utterly innocent of pins, safety or otherwise. A baby's dresses are fitted one into another and laid out flat on the matted floor, before the baby is laid into them; yes, literally laid as easily and comfortably as into the folds of a bed. A Japanese mother misses a lot of chances to dislocate the arm and elbow joints of her baby in forcing the tiny arms through narrow sleeves. And their loose sleeves are made long enough to cover the baby hands completely, so they will not scratch the face. All of which helps to explain why there are only cooings after the bath, instead of yells from the baby and a hysterical fit on the part of the mother.

A nursing bottle is unknown in Japan; for the simple reason that cow's or any other milk was never appreciated as fit food for man in the Elder Nippon. Man—or is it woman's vanity?—has not improved upon the wisdom of the All Wise in Japan so far as the baby's diet is concerned. In its loose, comfortable garments, with a gracious ministrations for its inner man, why should the Japanese baby cry?

Then, as soon as it begins to crawl about or tries to exact from gravity the respect due to an upstanding image of the Almighty—just look what an absence of knocks and bumps awaits its aspirations! A Japanese room is bare of furniture; there is nothing it can break, nor anything that can harm its soft head. The floor is covered with soft, white, thick, padded floor mats. A baby can fall upon it, face down or on its head, a hundred times a day, and it will stand a rare chance indeed of raising a single welt. It is a padded paradise. What excuse is there for a baby to make a grown-up's hair stand on end with its primitive music?

Japanese architecture is kind to the baby in another respect. Our houses are so airily built that Occidentals see little of them. It is certain that our architects have never been troubled with the question of ventilation since the days of the first Emperor, twenty-five centuries ago. In addition to this bountiful supply of air at the precious time of growth, the national love of our people for possessing a garden, be it never so much smaller than a handkerchief, has always tempted the babies out into the open and into the gracious company of flowers.

Whenever you see a carriage driving through a narrow street in Japan, you invariably see also a footman running ahead of the horses. Why? For the sake of the babies. The babies are allowed to take possession of any section of the city, the middle of streets among other places, and for the safety of the little ones a footman is required to run ahead to warn children and clear the street of them. To hurt a child, even in accident, is a crime for which an imported civilized code does not provide sufficient punishment, according to the Japanese way of thinking.

Just for the sake of argument, we shall say that among the owners of houses and flats in Japan, there lives a creature with "horned eyes" so monstrous as to ask of his prospective tenant whether she has a baby in the family. I fancy she would be dazed at the question for a moment—what is a family for, but for babies? But let the landlord give her to understand that he does not care to rent his houses to a family with babies, then what happens? Just this: he would not continue to live very long, for the simplest, nicest, and most natural of reasons that he would be mobbed—lynched, perhaps.

I do not believe that it ever occurs to a Japanese mind to leave babies behind when people are bound for the cherry clouds of Sumida or for the mushroom hunt on the hills about Kioto; in all picnics and temple festivals they are the chief guests of honor. It is largely for their pleasure that the innumerable holidays of the Empire are provided. In what other country's calendar can you find a national holiday devoted to the festival of dolls? It falls on the third of March, the greatest holiday for little girls, and another for boys on the fifth of May.

If Japanese babies are angels in comparison with some others who might be mentioned, I don't see why they shouldn't be, how they can help but be, since Japan is the nearest realm to paradise that mortal babies may hope to attain.